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ABSTRACT

The basic contention of this paper is that certification of educational evaluation personnel offers definite advantages to school districts and that these advantages tend to outweigh the disadvantages. The state board of education should be the final authority for certification, but multi-institutional involvement in designing and operating accredited programs is desirable. Certification would serve the interest of school districts best if it provided for substantial participation by school districts and the profession in the training and certification processes, if the certification involved multiple levels, required periodic updating, and were based on proficiency levels. All of the possible problem areas are surmountable, but not easily so. Probably the most critical problem area is the developmental need to place certification on a sound proficiency basis. (Author)

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THE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT'S VIEW OF EVALUATOR CERTIFICATION

A Paper Prepared for 1972 AERA
Division H Symposium
"Evaluator Certification: Infliction or [illegible]

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Introduction

The title of this presentation may seem to imply that e individual may be able to speak, or at least presume to be able to speak, generically of the view of the local school district toward evaluator certification. Of course, I would disclaim any such ability. What I will attempt to do is to summarize my own reflections, as well as thoughts emerging from interaction with some other professionals in public school program evaluation, as they relate to the subject of evaluator certification. What I have to present is a summary of my own views on the subject at this time, and I would make no further claim for what follows.

Although I am currently in a university teaching position, the position which I occupied when I accepted the responsibility speak to this topic was that of Assistant Superintendent of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Dallas Independent School District.

TM 001 534

Definition of Evaluator Certification

A working definition of evaluator certification is perhaps the most logical starting point for this topic. Evaluator certification is construed in this paper to refer to some formalized procedure which provides the professional engaged in educational evaluation with a set of recognized credentials attesting to his training, experience, and competencies in the practice of educational evaluation. This definition raises questions relating to the purpose of the certification porgram, the nature of the certification procedure, the identity of the certifying authority, and the criteria for certification.

Purpose of Evaluator Certification

Certification is fundamentally a protective device. Primarily it is a form of consumer protection; secondarily it protects a profession. In simple terms, the purpose of certification is to place a stamp of approval on a person to perform a certain function. But this is a simplified statement of the purpose. To be effectual toward its full purpose certification must rest on an authority base or a plurality of authority bases to such an extent that parties vitally affected by the services to be performed will recognize that the basic purpose of protection is being served.

Source of Evaluator Certification

Who should do the certifying is a complex issue. It involves certain "purist" perspectives at the extremes of a continuum and various combinations in between them. One one end of the continuum lies the extreme position of favoring the profession as the sole source of certification, and on the other end of the continuum lies the position of favoring the state as the sole source of certification. I am not a purist in this matter, although from the perspective of the local school district I believe the state board of education or its equivalent or designee would be the preferred source of final authority. Please notice, however, that favoring the state as final authority does not necessarily coincide with the position of favoring the state as sole authority.

I would favor a certification structure that included multiple interests in the certification process. Just as I believe that a training program for professionals in educational evaluation should be an integrated program of formal academic and field experiences, so do I believe the most desirable certification procedures would involve several types of institutions and/or agencies which have vital interests in what the certification process is supposed to protect. Even though legal authority to issue certification or to finalize it may rest with a single agency or board, such as, a state board of education, other institutions and/or agencies could be substantively involved in the process. Examples of other such institutions would be school districts, training institutions, and professional organizations.

Structure and Nature of the Certification Procedure

Regarding the nature of the certification process, I would favor first a system oriented to the performance capabilities of the professional. This menas that certification is distinctly different from a degree program based upon courses and credit hours. Transcripts do not indicate performance capabilities in functional settings.

A functional model that I could point to at the moment would be the Washington State certification model. I believe this model would provide the structure for most of the considerations heavily weighted toward the school district's perspective. In this model consortia of school districts, universities, and professional associations become the agencies for designing, developing, and operating accredited training programs which lead to certification.

A second consideration is that multiple levels should be involved in the certification so that the beginning professional moves through at least two or three levels before attaining the master evaluator or full continuing level.

A third consideration would be a structure that would provide for no permanent certificates as such, but rather a requirement for periodic updating of certificates.

Advantages to School Districts

It is my contention that certification of educational evaluators would have certain advantages for school districts and that in most

instances these advantages would outweigh the disadvantages. This contention is offered on the basis of an assumption of a quality certification program. Advantages and disadvantages could change decidedly if this assumption were not met. Some of the problem areas that might strongly affect my view of the advantages and disadvantages are discussed later.

One major area of advantages to school districts would be in staffing functions. A system of certification of educational evaluators would aid school districts in staffing for evaluation functions in several ways. First, and foremost, is the consumer protection, which is the primary purpose of certification. Since educational evaluation is a specialized area, many districts do not already have people competent to make a full judgment of the qualifications of an educational evaluator with a certification procedure to rely on, the employer would have a basis for employment that would extend beyond and precede his own judgment. The certification procedure would have involved professionals who were qualified to judge the qualifications of the applicant for certification. This type of screening would then precede the decisions which the prospective employer would have to make regading employment of any particular certified applicant.

Another way in which evaluator certification would aid school districts in their staffing functions would be the ready identification of a manpower pool of qualified personnel. Recruiters could look first to the holders of the certificate as their initial screening device.

An indirect form of aid to staffing would be the ready identification of educational evaluation as a professional career area in education. This would be an encouragement for able personnel to enter educational evaluation as a career field, and it would give impetus to development of university degree programs and perhaps other training programs in this specialized career area. It seems to me that availability of well-trained and identified manpower would have to be regarded as an advantage to school districts.

Another advantage to evaluator certification would be the encouragement it would give to school districts to institutionalize this specialized function in their operational programs. Certification would be a logical preliminary step also to state and perhaps federal funding formulas which would recognize the need for such personnel in school districts. This would be an incentive for districts who have not done so to employ educational evaluators, and it would tend to support additional staffing in districts which have made a partial but inadequate effort in staffing to support the evaluation function. If the certification were to carry endorsements in specialty areas, it would especially support the director of research and evaluation, or whatever the administrative title, in larger districts vis-a-vis other administrators, board of education, lay publics, and so forth in his staffing needs.

Another protection angle involved in staffing is the protection certification would afford a director of research and evaluation in a larger district from the pressure to hire people "in-house" (not qualified but "good old boys"). These pressures are often present

in school districts in explicit or subtle forms. Insofar as they work against securing the best qualified personnel for the job at hand with the salary available, they are extremely detrimental and need to be counterbalanced in every way possible.

Another major area that certification for educational evaluators would seem to offer an advantage for school districts would be in the area of credibility gaps. Certification would not ensure the absence of credibility gaps with relation to evaluation reports, but it would at least be a plus factor in this regard. What I mean by this is that decision makers at supra-program administrative levels, the board of education level, or the level of external funding agencies --state, federal, and private--are more likely to feel that they can depend on the information in evaluation reports if they know it has been delineated, obtained, and provided by certified professionals who have met certain competency and experience requirements to obtain their certification.

Another area of advantage to school districts would be realized if the certification involved levels, for the certification would then be of help in making decisions regarding promotion as well as placement to level of responsibility at initial employment.

A final area of advantage may be influenced more by my professional identity with this specialized field of education then by actual advantage to the school district, but it is my belief that it is a real advantage to the school district. This area is that of professionalization of educational evaluation. I do not see certification as

the only element of professionalization, nor even a necessary element, but I do see it as a helpful element in professionalization of educational evaluation. Insofar as certification contirubted to professionalization of educational evaluation, I believe it would add status and prestige to it as a professional area of endeavor and would tend to improve the overall quality of educational evaluation by giving more formal identity to a peer group of professionals who through various formal and informal means would tend to formulate and implement checks and balances within the profession.

Disadvantages to School Districts

When we consider the possible disadvantages to a school district in a procedure for evaluator certification, I suppose the one that stands out in my mind is the "hands tied" type of situation that one encounters from time to time in any certification program. This is part of the price that must be paid for the protection gained. Certification requirements do limit the freedom of a school district in its hiring of personnel more than would be the case without the requirements. Especially in large districts, I could see the functional limitation to some degree upon the staffing judgments of professionals in the district who are presumably quite capable of judging competencies and experience needed for a particular position. This limitation is a real one and comes about from having delegated or surrendered initial screening judgment regarding competencies and experience to the certification process.

Another disadvantage to the school district would be the additional red tape and reporting requirements that would be related to certified personnel. I would say this is a real and very likely disadvantage, but I would tend to discount it as a minor one to be tolerated in order to gain the advantages.

Possible Problem Areas

A basic problem area in certification based on competency is an inadequate state of the art at this time regarding proficiency levels in this specialized field. To enter such a program would require substantial developmental resources.

Another problem area is the danger that certification requirements would be placed too low, as has happened in some certification programs where a very few credit hours in a specialized field could gain one certification in that field. I think this danger is especially imminent in a single level rather than multilevel certification program. On the other hand, there is a danger that certification requirements can be placed too high. This would be detrimental to school districts also in that it would create a false scarcity of personnel and force districts to employ personnel with greater specialization than they need. Again, I think this danger is most imminent in a single level certification program.

Yet another problem area is the retardation in accomplishing the purpose of the program if grandfather clauses are permitted in the certification requirements. Grandfather clauses have often been adopted as a matter of expediency, but I do not believe they are desirable if they can be avoided.

Summary

To summarize the considerations of this paper, the basic contention is that certification of educational evaluation personnel offers definite advantages to school districts and that these advantages tend to outweigh the disadvantages. The state board of education should be the final authority for certification, but multi-institutional involvement in designing and operating accredited programs is desirable.

Certification would serve the interests of school districts best if it provided for substantial participation by school districts and the profession in the training and certification processes, if the certification involved multiple levels, required periodic updating, and were based on proficiency levels.

All of the possible problem areas are surmountable, but not easily so. Probably the most critical problem area is the developmental need to place certification on a sound proficiency basis.